

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 INRE-00 EURE-00 NSCE-00
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EB-08 OMB-01 /061 W
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O 011508Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1310
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 09628

DEPARTMENT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: FR, PINT, PGOV
SUBJECT: IMPLICATIONS OF BARRE'S CABINET CHANGE

1. THE NEW CABINET - WHAT IS IT? THE SECOND BARRE GOVERNMENT IS MOST NOTABLE FOR THE NAMES THAT ARE MISSING RATHER THAN FOR WHO REMAINS. OF THE FIFTEEN CABINET POSITIONS, NINE MINISTERS HAVE KEPT THEIR PREVIOUS POSTS, FOUR HAVE CHANGED PORTFOLIOS, LEAVING ONLY TWO NEW NAMES IN THE GOVERNMENT. THE ELIMINATION OF THE THREE MINISTERS OF STATE (PONIATOWSKI, LECANUET, GUICHARD) REMOVES TWO OF CHIRAC'S MOST VOCIFEROUS CRITICS, AND STRENGTHENS BARRE'S HAND, PERMITTING HIM TO CONDUCT HIS GOVERNMENTAL POLICY WITHOUT INTERFERENCE FROM SENIOR MINISTERS WHO HAD OUTSIDE POLITICAL BASES, OVERRIDING POLITICAL INTERESTS AND WHO WERE SENIOR LEADERS OF THE THREE MAJORITY FORMATIONS. CONCOMITANTLY, WHILE THE NEW

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GOVERNMENT IS POLITICALLY "BALANCED" (FIVE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY, 4 RPR, 3 RI, 2 CDS, 1 RADICAL SOCIALIST), NONE OF THE NEW CABINET MEMBERS ARE PARTICULARLY CLOSE TO THEIR RESPECTIVE PARTY HIERARCHIES, NOR DO THEY HOLD IMPORTANT PARTY POSITIONS. THE RI MINISTERS PARTICULARLY D'ORNANO AND FOURCADE, BY DINT OF THEIR CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH GISCARD, REMAIN AN IMPORTANT FORCE IN

THE NEW CABINET.

2. NO POLITICAL BASE: PRESIDENT GISCARD, RECOGNIZING THE HITHERTO FUTILE TASK OF TRYING TO RECONCILE DIVERGENT WISHES OF THE MAJORITY PARTIES, HAS SEVERED HIS NEW GOVERNMENT FROM ANY POLITICAL BASE. SIMULTANEOUSLY, THE CABINET HAS BEEN ASKED TO ASSUME A POLITICAL -- ALTHOUGH NON-PARTY-ORIENTED -- ROLE. THIS APPEARS TO BOIL DOWN TO THE NEW MINISTERS TRAVELLING THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO EXPLAIN PERSONALLY THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMS, A CHANGE FROM PAST GOVERNMENTS WHICH WERE ALMOST EXCLUSIVELY PARIS-BASED AND ORIENTED.

3. GISCARD AND CHIRAC: THE CRITICAL -- AND STILL UNRESOLVED -- ISSUE REMAINS THE FUTURE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND JACQUES CHIRAC. IN HIS SPEECH ON MONDAY NIGHT, VGE CALLED FOR A "FRANK AND LOYAL MAJORITY PACT." CHIRAC'S FIRST PUBLIC RESPONSE WAS A QUALIFIED "YES ... BUT." IN A SPEECH GIVEN MARCH 30 TO RPR PARLIAMENTARIANS, CHIRAC NOTED THAT "OUR LOYALTY TO THE COMMON ACTION IS GIVEN. WE DON'T DOUBT THAT WE WILL BE REPAYED IN TURN." IT IS STILL UNCLEAR WHAT "QUID PRO QUO" CHIRAC WILL REQUIRE FOR RPR PARLIAMENTARY SUPPORT.

4. GISCARD'S SCENARIO: GISCARD'S CURRENT STRATEGY CALLS FOR A CONTINUATION OF BARRE'S ECONOMIC GAME PLAN AND THE FORMULATION OF A SET OF SOCIAL REFORMS AFFECTING FAMILIES, THE AGED, AND FIRST JOBS FOR YOUTH. THERE IS ALREADY A GENERAL CONSENSUS AMONG MAJORITY PARTIES IN

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SUPPORT OF BARRE'S ECONOMIC PROGRAM, AND THIS PORTION OF GISCARD'S "ACTION PROGRAM" SHOULD NOT ENCOUNTER SIGNIFICANT MAJORITY DISAGREEMENT WHEN PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT "FOR APPROVAL." HOWEVER, THE STILL VAGUELY DEFINED SOCIAL REFORM PLATFORM MAY ENCOUNTER SERIOUS OPPOSITION FROM THE RPR. AS SHOWN IN LAST YEAR'S DEBATES OVER A CAPITAL GAINS TAX PROPOSITION, CHIRAC WILL HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME (EVEN IF HE'S WILLING TO TRY) CONVINCING CONSERVATIVE RPR DEPUTIES TO SUPPORT ANY SWEEPING LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE THAT SMACKS OF A MAJORITY EQUIVALENT TO THE LEFT'S COMMON PROGRAM. HOWEVER, SUCH REFORMS ARE UNDOUBTEDLY NECESSARY IF GISCARD HAS ANY HOPE OF WINNING A MAJORITY LEGISLATIVE VICTORY IN 1978, AND WE THEREFORE EXPECT EITHER SOME WORKING ARRANGEMENT OR CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GISCARD AND CHIRAC OVER THIS PORTION OF THE LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE.

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5. COMMENT: BARRE'S REFORM PACKAGE WILL PROBABLY BE PRESENTED TO THE PARLIAMENT EARLY ON IN THE SPRING LEGISLATIVE SESSION WHICH OFFICIALLY BEGINS APRIL 2. UNTIL SUCH TIME AS A CONCRETE PACKAGE IS PROMULGATED AND PRESENTED, THERE WILL PROBABLY BE A BRIEF HONEYMOON PERIOD BETWEEN GISCARD AND CHIRAC. BUT, AS OF NOW, THE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CHIRAC HAVE NOT CHANGED -- THEY REMAIN CAUTIOUS ADVERSARIES, TENUOUSLY LINKED BY CIRCUMSTANCE.

6. WILL IT WORK? GISCARD'S "APOLITICAL" CABINET STRATEGY REPRESENTS HIS LAST CHANCE BEFORE NEXT YEAR'S LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. BUT EVEN ASSUMING THE SUCCESSFUL PASSAGE OF

AN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL REFORM PACKAGE, GISCARD'S STRATEGY LACKS THE CRUCIAL LINK BETWEEN GOVERNMENT ACTION AND ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNING. THERE IS NO ONE IN THE NEW CABINET WHO HAS SUFFICIENT POLITICAL CLOUT TO RALLY SUPPORT IN THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. FOR THIS, BOTH BARRE AND GISCARD WILL SOONER OR LATER HAVE TO TURN TO THE PARTIES FOR SUPPORT, AND IT IS THAT ISSUE WHICH HAS NOT BEEN ADDRESSED IN THE CABINET CHANGES.

GAMMON

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